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## NOTES

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### CHARLES BOOTH, 1840-1916

The recent death of Mr. Charles Booth brought to an end the work of a man to whom, in America as well as in England, statisticians, economists, sociologists, and all other students of modern social problems owe much. In order either to understand or to appreciate Mr. Booth's work it is necessary to project ourselves back into that decade between 1880 and 1890 when he collected his statistics of London poverty and first planned the great series of volumes that he called the *Life and Labour of the People in London*.

It is probably true that no period in England since that of the Chartist agitation has seen a social awakening at once so vigorous and so far-reaching in its consequences. The social unrest of the eighties was due to many causes; but it first became obvious, perhaps, with the publication in the autumn of 1883 of the sensational pamphlet, *The Bitter Cry of Outcast London*, a tract written by a city missionary, and, as we read it now, a tract of little merit, filled with exaggerated stories of distress. Nevertheless, the social conscience of England was stirred; sober and thoughtful people were moved to serious heart-searchings, and the emotional were led to talk of a social revolution.

A sentimental interest in those who were called "the perishing and dangerous classes" or "the outcast poor," according to the temper of the writer or speaker, had also been stimulated by Besant's popular novels, *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* and *Children of Gibeon*. The "palace of delight" pictured by Besant in the earlier novel grew in the popular imagination until a great fund was easily raised to build a real "People's Palace" on the Mile-End Road, which was opened by the queen in 1887. It was this same decade of the eighties that saw the characteristic English Socialist organizations come into being. The famous manifesto of the Social Democratic Federation was prepared by Hyndman and issued in 1883; and that same year saw the founding of the Fabian Society. This was also the decade in which Canon Barnett "went as a prophet" to preach the gospel of social righteousness in the conservative halls of Oxford and the decade of the founding of Toynbee Hall and Oxford House and that elder group of English settlements.

Sensational stories of London poverty filled the magazines. "General" Booth, of the then recently founded Salvation Army, began

appealing for help for the disinherited who were sleeping out by scores of hundreds on the Embankment and other public places. The first "food and shelter depot" of the Salvation Army was opened in 1887, and the "darkest England" policy, for which money was lavishly contributed, had been inaugurated before the end of the decade.

A writer in the *Quarterly Review*, discussing in 1883 the social unrest that was troubling the comfortable classes, said emphatically: "To say that we are surrounded by a spirit of social revolution is as much a commonplace as to say that we are surrounded by a spirit of scepticism." "Lazarus at the Gate" was the title of an article in another well-known review, in which, although the misery of Lazarus was not denied, a warning was issued against allowing "the present tide of feeling . . . to precipitate us into unwise legislation." "There is no doubt," the writer conceded, "about the existence or extent of the evil requiring to be dealt with. . . ." "The public conscience seems to be at last effectually awakened to its responsibility with respect to the state of wretchedness and degradation in which large sections of the poorer classes have so long been suffered to live."<sup>1</sup>

Political use was made of the new interest in London poverty, and a conservative observer charged that England was living in "the dream world of the agitator where all that is, is inverted, is incalculable." Joseph Chamberlain claimed that there was evidence to show that never before in English history had "the misery of the poor been more intense or their daily life more hopeless and degraded." Chamberlain was accused of "playing tricks with statistics." Nevertheless, London was startled, and listened when he said, "The vast wealth which modern progress created has run into 'pockets'; individuals and classes have proven rich beyond the dreams of avarice . . . but the great majority of the toilers and spinners have derived no proportionate advantage from the prosperity which they have helped to create."

It was against this background of disturbed social passions that Mr. Charles Booth quietly began his work of investigation. "We are a long way towards understanding anything under our consideration when we have laid it open even without comment," he wrote, quoting the *Autobiography of Mark Ruthenford*, in the first part of the first volume of *Life and Labour of the People in London*.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Booth was a great man of

<sup>1</sup> "Lazarus at the Gate," by the author of *Social Wreckage*, in *The Contemporary Review*, Vol. XLV, 82.

<sup>2</sup> The first edition of this work, which consisted only of two volumes and an appendix, was published in 1891 and was called, not *Life and Labour*, but *Labour and*

affairs who had the mind and the temper of a student. He was in no sense a social reformer or agitator. He had made a study of the statistics of occupations, but he had not yet ventured independently into the field of social inquiry when he began the task of collecting statistics relating to London poverty. Statistics in plenty had been produced both by the reformers and by their foes, but no one trusted them. The *Quarterly* attacked Mr. Hyndman for what were called "the statistics of agitation," and the reassuring figures of the review were in turn contemptuously dismissed as "theoretical statistics the falsehood of which could be disproved by one walk through the streets of London."

Official inquiries had been, throughout the decade, frequent but not fruitful. A Royal Commission on the Housing of the Working Classes had been followed by parliamentary inquiries into unemployment, foreign immigration, poor relief, and, finally, the sweating system. But, in spite of official interest in the welfare of the poorest classes, the decade closed in the social disorder of the great Dock Strike.

At a time when partisan feeling ran high Mr. Booth began his work without partisanship. His purpose was not to "state the case" for the comfortable classes to which he belonged nor to state the claims of those who advocated or condemned any one of the social panaceas that were on the market. He wished only to gather the facts. Discussing the motives that led him to undertake his great inquiry, Mr. Booth said simply:

East London lay hidden behind a curtain on which were painted terrible pictures: starving children, suffering women, overworked men; the horrors of drunkenness and vice; monsters and demons of inhumanity; giants of disease

*Life of the People.* A large part of the material relating to East London had already appeared in the *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society* in the form of two papers read by Mr. Booth before the Society. The first of these was called "The Inhabitants of Tower Hamlets (School Board Division), Their Condition and Occupations" (see *Journal Royal Statistical Society* [June, 1887], L, 326-91); and the second paper, "Condition and Occupations of the People of East London and Hackney," was read before the Society June, 1888 (*ibid.*, LI, 276-331). It is of interest that Professor Alfred Marshall, who took part in the discussion that followed the reading of Mr. Booth's first paper, said that it would "be difficult to conceive a paper of more absorbing interest to economists than that which had just been read." He was certain, he said, that "all those economists whom he had the pleasure of knowing would say that there was not a line in the paper which they ought not to think over most carefully," and he said further that the work when completed "would take a unique place among the materials out of which their science was being built up" (*ibid.*, L, 394).

and despair. Did these pictures truly represent what lay behind, or did they bear to the facts a relation similar to that which the pictures outside a booth at some country fair bear to the performance or show within? This curtain we have tried to lift.

By lifting the curtain to show the real world that it hid, Mr. Booth expected to expose a sensationalism which was detrimental to social progress, and to show that the problem of poverty had been exaggerated, but he worked "with no bias nor distorting aim, and with no foregone conclusions." In the first edition of his first volume he says, "I have throughout my inquiry leaned to the safe side, preferring to paint things too dark rather than too bright, not because I myself take a gloomy view, but to avoid the chance of understating the evils with which society has to deal." In later editions this statement was corrected by a note signed by the initials "C. B." and the date 1902. "I undoubtedly expected," he wrote at this later period, "that this investigation would expose exaggerations, and it did so; but the actual poverty disclosed was so great, both in mass and in degree, and so absolutely certain, that I have gradually become equally anxious not to overstate."

Mr. Booth began his inquiry in Tower Hamlets, a district in East London, which was supposed, he wrote, "to contain the most destitute population in England and to be, as it were, the focus of the problem of poverty in the midst of wealth which is troubling the minds and hearts of so many people." But it was one of Mr. Booth's discoveries that there was a more destitute population across the river. The "bitter cry of outcast London" which came from the East should have come with greater intensity from the South; for in the districts of Waterloo, St. Saviour's, and Bermondsey, in "historic poverty-stricken Southwark," in the nests of courts and alleys about old St. George's Church, among which stood the old Marshalsea prison, Mr. Booth found what he called the most impenetrable mass of poverty "all round about the bridges and extending in a woeful fringe along the river bank, whence its life blood is largely drawn." Comparing the different parts of South London with each other and with other districts in London, East London receded and Mr. Booth, in his own words, "placed St. Saviour's Southwark on her wretched throne."

Although Mr. Booth's name has been connected with more than one social-reform movement, notably, of course, with the attempt to secure old-age pensions in England, he disclaimed at the outset any purpose beyond the hope that the great problem of poverty might be "better stated." That is, his design was "solely to observe and chronicle the

actual, leaving the remedies to others." In the first edition of his first volume in 1890 he wrote:

If the facts stated are of any use in helping social reformers to find remedies for the evils which exist, or do anything to prevent the adoption of false remedies, my purpose is answered. It was not my intention to bring forward any suggestions of my own, and if I have ventured, here and there, and especially in the concluding chapters, to go beyond my program, it has been with much hesitation.

In 1902, reverting to this attitude, he wrote with characteristic humility:

The last word I would add is this: the object of the sixteen volumes has been to describe London as it appeared in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Beyond this I have sought, however imperfectly, to show what is being done to ameliorate its conditions. . . . For the treatment of disease, it is first necessary to establish the facts as to its character, extent, and symptoms. Perhaps the qualities of mind which enable a man to make this inquiry are the least of all likely to give him that elevation of soul, sympathetic insight, and sublime confidence which must go to the making of a great regenerating teacher.

The whole difference between optimism and pessimism, Mr. Booth pointed out, might be caused by two ways of looking at mere figures; and he warned the optimist that although in East London it might be regarded as hopeful that only one-tenth of the population could be reckoned as very poor, yet the absolute numbers must not be forgotten; "when we count up the 100,000 individuals, the 20,000 families, who lead so pinched a life among the population described, and remember that there are in addition double the number who, if not acutally pressed by want, yet have nothing to spare, we shrink aghast from the picture." On the other hand, he warned those who were deeply pessimistic that the relative numbers should likewise not be overlooked. Thus he wrote:

To judge rightly we need to bear both in mind, never to forget the numbers when thinking of the percentages, nor the percentages when thinking of the numbers. This last is difficult to those whose daily experience or whose imagination brings vividly before them the trials and sorrows of individual lives. They refuse to set off and balance the happy hours of the same class, or even of the same people, against these miseries; much less can they consent to bring the lot of other classes into the account, add up the opposing figures, and contentedly carry forward a credit balance. In the arithmetic of woe they can only add or multiply, they cannot subtract or divide. In intensity of feeling such as this, and not in statistics, lies the power to move the world. But by statistics must this power be guided if it would move the world aright.

Since the days of John Howard and Sir Frederick Eden no private individual in England had undertaken a social inquiry that compared either in scope or in social importance with the *Life and Labour of the People in London*. This study of London poverty, begun in 1886, was completed in 1902. "Seventeen years and an equal number of volumes have been occupied with this inquiry," he wrote in his final volume. "But the subjects covered offer a wide range; being no less than life and industry as they exist in London at the end of the Nineteenth Century under the influences of education, religion, and administration."

Mr. Booth received the gold medal of the Royal Statistical Society in 1892, and he was president of the Society from 1892 to 1894. He was a member of the Royal Commission on the Aged Poor, 1893-95, of the Tariff Commission, 1904, and of the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws and the Relief of Distress from 1905 until his resignation, because of ill-health, in 1908. He became the Right Honorable Charles Booth in 1904 by appointment to the Privy Council. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society and held honorary degrees from the universities of Oxford, Cambridge, and Liverpool. To the end, however, his modesty remained one of his most striking characteristics. He rejoiced that in what he called his attempt at "a better statement" of the problem of poverty he had had many imitators, and he wrote with some satisfaction at the close of the last volume of *Life and Labour* in 1902, "The spirit of patient inquiry is abroad; my attempt is only one of its children."

EDITH ABBOTT

CHICAGO SCHOOL OF CIVICS AND PHILANTHROPY

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## WASHINGTON NOTES

### THE PROBABLE DEFICIT

The publication of the finance report for the current year has made evident the fact that it will be necessary to provide very largely for federal expenses by finding sources of revenue other than those which are now open under the terms of existing taxation. The finance report shows that the expenses for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1917, will be about \$103,000,000 more than the resources during that time, while by the end of the following fiscal year (June 30, 1918), for which Congress is now making appropriations, there will be a deficit of about \$185,000,000. This latter deficit, however, will have been reached through the exhaustion of a fund of about \$114,000,000, estimated to represent the free resources of the Treasury on July 1, 1917. The "deficit" which must